

1 Sermon, February 20, 2010

Texts: Psalm 25:1-22, Luke 18:24-30

Title: "For God's Sake!"

1. For God's sake is a plea
 - a. in Scripture, plea for God to do something for God's sake, not ours – Psalm 25
 - b. in common language, equivalent to "for crying out loud."
2. Luke 18 – giving up stuff for the sake of the K of G will be rewarded.
3. For God's sake, love yourself – your true self

1. For God's sake is a plea

I want to talk to you today about the phrase, "For God's sake" or "For Heaven's sake," which is essentially the same thing.

When we say it, we aren't generally asking someone to do something for the sake of God's will or God's kingdom.

We don't say, "I really believe that God is asking us to do such and such, so let's do it for *God's sake*."

Instead, the phrase "for God's sake" is really a plea.

"For God's sake, *please* don't do that!"

It's essentially calling on a higher authority to reinforce what we want to say.

"Pay attention to me, for God's sake!"

In most cases, when we use the phrase "for heaven's sake" or "for God's sake" or even "for goodness sake," it could easily be replaced with the phrase "for crying out loud!"

α. in Scripture, a plea for God to do something

Well, it's interesting that in the Bible, it's also used as a plea. It is asking for God to do something for God's sake. In Psalm 25:

Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness'
sake, O LORD!

And later in the Psalm:

For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.

2 Sermon, February 20, 2010

The psalm writer is pleading for forgiveness.

There may be no good reason for the psalm writer to expect forgiveness, except for the goodness of God. So the psalm writer appeals to God's goodness.

2. Luke 18 – for God's sake

In the New Testament, we have the story from the gospels, which is about doing stuff for God's sake, or at least for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

The reading from Luke begins with Jesus saying something a little hard to stomach. Jesus said:

How hard it is for the wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.

We can get all hung up about it if we want, but it may be that there is a misprint in the Greek of the New testament. The word for camel is one letter different than the word for rope. It is still impossible to put a rope through the eye of a needle, but at least it makes more sense.

So what was Jesus talking about? Who was wealthy? Is wealth the same thing now as it was back then?

The answer is no. The economic system was very different back then. Now, the economic system runs on capital, and there is no theoretical limit to the amount of capital one may have. Back then, the economic system then was about land, and there is a limited supply of land.

There were no stocks or bonds, no paper money. There was even a limited supply of coins, and the government had most of those. A family would probably have little actual money, maybe a few coins that were the woman's dowry and would stay her property, not her husband's.

3 Sermon, February 20, 2010

So most trade was by barter, by relationship: you do this for me, I'll do this for you. The legal process was mostly reserved for land. And at the time, the land ownership system was full of inequality. In Jesus' time, there were a few big landowners, and many smaller landowners. If a peasant had a bad crop year, he might be forced to borrow grain from a wealthy landowner. And if the farmer could not pay the wealthy landowner back in a year, he gave up his land to the wealthy landowner, who then had even more land.

In that time and place, a person could not become wealthy except at the expense of others. Wealthy people were either big landowners, who got their land at the expense of small farmers, or they were tax collectors, who accumulated money by taking extra from the average person, or they were somehow in cahoots with the Roman overlords.

So Jesus was saying that it was very difficult for those who exploited others to be part of the movement of what God was doing. This was because the Kingdom of God is about sharing. The Kingdom of God is about justice. The Kingdom of God is about doing things for God's sake and not for our own sake. The Kingdom of God is about God creating a community of love and patience and mutual support among his people

The last part of the passage is very revealing. When they started talking about who could be saved, Peter said, "Look, we have left our homes and followed you." Why would Peter say that? I think it is self-justification. Peter was saying, "Hey, we're not the ones who have accumulated great wealth. We've even given up our homes to follow you. So doesn't that mean we're automatically on God's good side?"

Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life."

I think Jesus was checking Peter's motivation. Had Peter left his home for the sake of the Kingdom of God? If so, there would be plenty of rewards. If it wasn't for the sake of God's kingdom, well... there were no guarantees.

It's a good question for us. Are we doing things for the sake of the Kingdom of God? Are we doing things for God's sake?

4 Sermon, February 20, 2010

3. For God's sake, love yourself – your true self

Now, I want you to pay attention to what I just said, and then again I *don't* want you to pay attention to what I just said.

I want you to do things for the sake of the Kingdom of God, but I don't want you to get all guilty about it.

Good, faithful people often worry too much about whether they are doing enough for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Peter is probably an example. He may have been motivated to ask his question about giving up their homes out a sense of guilt. It's hard to know Peter's motivation, but it does seem that he was trying to seem better in Jesus' eyes, and that was probably because he was feeling uncomfortable about his own spiritual state.

Remember how the Psalm writer was so concerned about his sins, and asking for forgiveness? The psalm writer was a good and faithful person who was trying to do God's will, but worried that he fell short of the mark. He was feeling guilty.

And I don't believe that Jesus came into the world to make us feel guilty.

I believe that Jesus said so much of what he said to get people to think about what they were doing, about their values, about who they were following. But it was about motivating people, not about causing guilt.

If we are to do things for the sake of the Kingdom of God, we have to be motivated by love, not by fear. If we are to imitate Christ and live as Christians, we need to love ourselves, as well as love others.

Nothing in the Gospels tells us that Jesus was guilty over not doing enough. There is never a passage about Jesus getting down on himself.

I believe you have to love and accept yourself in order to love and accept others fully.

You have to allow yourself to receive the grace of God, in order to live "for God's sake."

Maybe that's how we should use the phrase "For God's sake." Maybe it should be about how we live, and how we love. And remember to love ourselves.

5 Sermon, February 20, 2010

Amen.

"Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" He replied, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God." Then Peter said, "Look, we have left our homes and followed you." And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.'" Luke 18:24-30, NRSV.

"To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me. Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O LORD! Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees. For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great. Who are they that fear the LORD? He will teach them the way that they should choose. They will abide in prosperity, and their children shall possess the land. The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes his covenant known to them. My eyes are ever toward the LORD, for he will pluck my feet out of the net. Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. Relieve the troubles of my heart, and bring me out of my distress. Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me. O guard my life, and deliver me; do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you. Redeem Israel, O God, out of all its troubles." Psalms 25:1-22, NRSV.